

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 020706
ORIGIN NODS-00

INFO OCT-02 ISO-00 /001 R

DRAFTED BY NEA:NAVELIOTES:BDF
APPROVED BY THE SECRETARY
INR:HNSAUNDERS
S/S-O -JETHYDEN
NEA:SSOBER
PM:LGELB

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM FLASH
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV FLASH

S E C R E T STATE 020706

NODIS
FOR USDEL NO.14FROM SECRETARY TO LEWIS AND ATHERTON

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, IS, US, EG

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH BEGIN

REF: TEL AVIV 947 AND 1113

DELIVER AT 0700

1. WE ARE IN PROCESS OF CONSIDERING BEST TIMING FOR FINAL
DECISIONS RE AIRCRAFT FOR ISRAEL, SAUDI ARABIA AND EGYPT.
AMONG FACTORS WE MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT ARE POSTPONEMENT
OF WEIZMAN VISIT (AT ISRAELI INITIATIVE), PRESSURE FROM THE
SAUDIS, USEFULNESS OF F-5S TO SADAT, CONGRESSIONAL
ATTITUDES AND OUR HOPES TO MOVE AHEAD ON PEACE PROCESS. IN
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THIS CONTEXT, ISRAELI DECISION TO POSTPONE VISIT WAS WELCOME
GIVEN SERIOUS HARM ANNOUNCEMENT OF BILLION DOLLAR PLUS AIR-
CRAFT TRANSFER TO ISRAEL WOULD HAVE ON OUR EFFORTS TO GET
PEACE PROCESS GOING AGAIN WITH SAUDI SUPPORT.

2. WE ASSUME BEGIN CALLED MEETING TO DISCUSS ISRAELI
DESIRE THAT POSTPONED VISIT NOT "SLOW DOWN" APPROVAL

PROCESS OF ITEMS IN MATMON C, PARTICULARLY F-16/15 REQUEST WITHIN CONTEXT OF PRESS REPORTS (PARTICULARLY GWERTZMAN IN NYT JANUARY 24) DEVOTED TO PENDING AIRCRAFT DECISIONS. ARTICLE READS IN PART "STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL SAID THAT THE DECISION ON THE SALE TO ISRAEL WAS POTENTIALLY SO SENSITIVE THAT IT WOULD REQUIRE A CLOSE EXAMINATION OF THE CURRENT STATE OF EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS AND THAT, BECAUSE OF THE CURRENT TENSIONS THERE WAS AN INCLINATION AMONG MANY OFFICIALS TO POSTPONE A DECISION."

3. ALSO, THE GOI IS OBVIOUSLY AWARE OF THE CURRENT AIPAC STIMULATED EFFORT IN THE SFRC WHICH HAS RESULTED IN 10 (OUT OF 15) SENATORS ASKING THE ADMINISTRATION NOT TO SUBMIT THE SAUDI F-15 REQUEST AT THIS TIME.

4. YOU WILL HAVE RECEIVED SEPTTEL AS CONCERNS OUR LATEST DISCUSSIONS HERE RE WEIZMAN VISIT. IN THIS RESPECT, WE WERE NONCOMMITAL WHEN PRESSED BY THE ISRAELIS TO SAY THAT, DESPITE POSTPONEMENT WE WOULD MOVE TO EARLY APPROVAL OF F-16. DOD HAS INFORMED ISRAELIS THE BEST TIME FOR RESCHEDULING VISIT IS MID-MARCH.

5. WE ARE CONSIDERING THE POSSIBILITY OF NOT MOVING AHEAD WITH ANY OF THE AIRCRAFT DECISIONS IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. WE HAVE TAKEN STEPS TO EXPLORE THE IDEA OF A DELAY WITH THE SAUDIS. AS CONCERNS ISRAEL, THE BIGGEST
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PROBLEM WE FACE IS HOW WE POSTPONE THE F-16 DECISION WITHOUT MAKING OURSELVES VULNERABLE TO THE CHARGE THAT WE ARE USING MILITARY SUPPLY TO "PRESSURE" ISRAEL IN THE PEACE PROCESS.

6. I HAVE ADDRESSED THE MILITARY AIRCRAFT ISSUES IN MY VARIOUS MEETINGS WITH THE CONGRESS. IT IS DIFFICULT TO CHARACTERIZE THESE MEETINGS OTHER THAN TO SAY THAT ALL OF THE OBVIOUS CONCERNS WERE EXPRESSED, PARTICULARLY ON SAUDI F-15S, AND I BELIEVE THERE IS UNDERSTANDING OF OUR POSITION AS WELL AS OPPOSITION.

7. YOU SHOULD BE AWARE OF THE FOLLOWING WHICH I USED ON THE HILL WITH THE SFRC TODAY.

-- I HAVE MADE NO RECOMMENDATIONS ON THIS MATTER AND THE PRESIDENT HAS MADE NO DECISIONS.

-- WE ARE TRYING TO THINK OUR WAY THROUGH THIS VERY DIFFICULT ISSUE, AND I WANT TO SHARE WITH YOU THE CONSIDERATIONS WHICH ARE GOING THROUGH MY MIND AND THE MINDS OF OTHERS, AND THE COMPLEXITIES WE ARE LOOKING AT.

-- ON THE ONE HAND, IT CAN BE ARGUED THAT ANY NEW MAJOR AIRCRAFT SALES TO THIS REGION ARE INCONSISTENT WITH BOTH THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS AND WITH AN EVENTUAL SETTLEMENT, THAT NEW WEAPONS WILL ONLY COMPLICATE THE NEGOTIATIONS AND THE HOPE FOR PEACE.

-- ON THE OTHER HAND, HOWEVER, THERE ARE SOME COMPELLING REASONS FOR GOING FORWARD:

--- OUR COMMITMENT TO ISRAEL'S SECURITY IS AND MUST BE UNEQUIVOCAL AND FIRM. THIS MEANS PROVIDING THEM WITH THEIR ESSENTIAL SECURITY NEEDS. THE ISRAELIS BELIEVE F-16S AND SOME ADDITIONAL F-15S ARE NECESSARY FOR THIS
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PURPOSE, AND THEIR REQUEST FOR SUCH AIRCRAFT IS UNDER CONSIDERATION. AS CONCERNS THE F-16S, GIVEN OUR COMMITMENT IN PRINCIPLE TO PROVIDE THE AIRCRAFT, THE QUESTIONS ARE TIMING AND NUMBERS.

--- THE EGYPTIAN MILITARY SITUATION IS A DETERIORATING ONE SINCE SADAT MADE THE DECISION TO CUT TIES WITH THE SOVIETS. HE AND HIS MILITARY HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY DISTURBED AT THIS DECLINE IN WHAT THEY REGARD AS EGYPT'S BASIC DEFENSE POSTURE. ONE OF THE THINGS THAT HAS BEEN CONSIDERED IS A LIMITED NUMBER OF SHORT-RANGE F-5 INTERCEPTORS.

-- THE SAUDIS HAVE REQUESTED SOME 60 F-15S. ALL AGREE THAT SAUDI SUPPORT IS FUNDAMENTAL TO THE SADAT PEACE INITIATIVE; THEY ARE ALSO OF MAJOR IMPORTANCE TO OUR INTERESTS IN LIMITING SOVIET INFLUENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND STABILIZING OIL PRICES. FOR SEVERAL YEARS THE SAUDIS HAVE RECOGNIZED THE NEED TO REPLACE THEIR AGING BRITISH LIGHTNING INTERCEPTORS, AND THEY HAVE TURNED TO US TO HELP IN MODERNIZING THEIR AIR FORCE. GIVEN THE TIMEFRAME FOR POSSIBLE DELIVERY OF F-15S (1981-82), WE BELIEVE THEIR NEED IS LEGITIMATE. THEREFORE, WE HAVE ALL OF THESE FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN DECIDING DO WE OR DON'T WE GO FORWARD. ON BALANCE, I BELIEVE WE SHOULD GO FORWARD WITH F-15S WHETHER AT THIS MOMENT OR NOT. BUT WE HAVE MADE NO FINAL DECISIONS RE TIMING. WE WILL TAKE SENATORS' LETTERS INTO ACCOUNT IN REACHING OUR FORMAL DECISIONS.

8. ALL THE FOREGOING IS FOR YOUR BACKGROUND. IN RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FROM BEGIN YOU SHOULD SAY:

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-- WE ARE MOVING AHEAD WITH OUR STUDY OF ISRAELI ARMS REQUESTS AND OUR COMMITMENT TO ISRAEL'S SECURITY REMAINS UNEQUIVOCAL AND FIRM. AS I TOLD THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, THERE IS NO QUESTION OF OUR COMMITMENT TO PROVIDE F-16S TO ISRAEL AND WE ARE NOW WORKING ON THE PROBLEMS OF TIMING AND NUMBERS. WE HOPE TO BE ABLE TO REACH DECISIONS IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

-- AS FOR SAUDI ARABIA, YOU SHOULD NOTE THAT WE ATTACH VERY GREAT IMPORTANCE TO ITS CONTINUING A MODERATE STANCE SUPPORTIVE OF SADAT IN THE PEACEMAKING EFFORT. THIS INCLUDES THE SAUDIS' CRUCIAL FINANCIAL AID TO EGYPT AND THEIR ENCOURAGEMENT OF OTHER CONFRONTATION STATES TO MAINTAIN AT LEAST SOME FLEXIBILITY REGARDING THE PEACE TALKS. YOU SHOULD POINT OUT THAT THE SAUDI ATTITUDE IS OF IMPORTANCE TO THE U.S. IN MANY RESPECTS, NOT LEAST IN MAINTAINING SAUDI SUPPORT FOR SADAT'S PEACE INITIATIVE. THEY SEE A U.S. DECISION ON THEIR LONGSTANDING F-15 REQUEST AS A CRUCIAL INDICATOR OF OUR RELATIONSHIP AND WE MUST CONSIDER SERIOUSLY WHEN AND HOW BEST TO RESPOND. WE ARE SURE BEGIN WILL APPRECIATE OUR SUBSTANTIAL INTEREST IN THIS MATTER AS WE DO HIS. WE WILL TRY TO BALANCE THEM REASONABLY.

-- WITH RESPECT TO EGYPT, WE ARE EXPLORING THE QUESTION OF F-5S. THIS MAY BECOME A USEFUL WAY OF BOLSTERING SADAT'S POSITION WITH HIS MILITARY, WHOSE SUPPORT HE NEEDS TO BE FLEXIBLE AND REALISTIC IN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. WE ARE STILL STUDYING THE QUESTION.

9. PER LEWIS-SAUNDERS TELECON AND NEED TO REPLY TO BEGIN ON SADAT'S PUBLIC STATEMENT RE THE U.S. SUPPLYING EGYPT WITH ADVANCED WEAPONRY COMPARABLE TO OUR MILITARY AID PROGRAM WITH ISRAEL, YOU SHOULD DRAW ON FOLLOWING.

-- I THINK WE HAVE TO UNDERSTAND WHY SADAT FEELS THE NEED
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TO MAKE SUCH A PUBLIC STATEMENT. HE IS GENUINELY CONCERNED ABOUT THE POTENTIAL EFFECT ON THE PEACE PROCESS, AMONG HIS OWN PEOPLE AND THE OTHER ARABS, IF THE U.S. ANNOUNCES A LARGE, NEW AMERICAN MILITARY SUPPLY PROGRAM FOR ISRAEL, INCLUDING ADVANCED AIRCRAFT, WHILE CRITICAL NEGOTIATIONS ARE GOING ON. HE IS ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT THE DETERIORATION OF EGYPT'S MILITARY CAPABILITY,

PARTICULARLY BECAUSE OF SOVIET ACTIVITIES IN THE HORN AND ELSEWHERE IN AFRICA, WHICH HE SEES AS UNDERMINING MODERATE REGIMES AND THREATENING STABILITY. I BELIEVE HE IS NOT SO MUCH MAKING A REQUEST FOR AID AS CALLING ATTENTION TO HIS PROBLEM.

10. YOU SHOULD ALSO MAKE POINT THAT WE DO NOT HAVE UNDER CONSIDERATION ANY MAJOR ARMS ITEMS FOR EGYPT EXCEPT THE F-5S, OF WHICH GOI ALREADY AWARE.

11. AS CONCERNS THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS, YOU SHOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS MEETING TO URGE ISRAELIS TO AUTHORIZE WEIZMAN TO RETURN TO SECURITY COMMITTEE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. WE TRUST GOI IS NOT GOING TO INSIST THAT ALL

CRITICAL COMMENT OF ISRAEL FROM ANY SOURCE IN EGYPT CEASE BEFORE TAKING THIS STEP. THERE WILL HAVE TO BE SOME REASONABLE STANDARD IF THERE ARE TO BE FUTURE DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS WHICH WE ASSUME IS STILL MAJOR GOI GOAL.

12. FYI ONLY. NOT TO BE FORESHADOWED TO THE ISRAELIS IN YOUR THURSDAY MEETING BUT FOR YOUR PLANNING PURPOSES, WE WILL HAVE A MESSAGE ON ANOTHER SUBJECT FOR YOU TO CONVEY TO BEGIN SATURDAY MORNING AT LEAST BY PHONE.
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TO WHITE HOUSE IMMEDIATE

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FOL STATE 020706 SENT ACTION JERUSALEM TEL AVIV JAN 26, 1978

REPEATED TO YOU QUOTE

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ACCOUNT IN REACHING OUR FORMAL DECISIONS.

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ON SADAT'S PUBLIC STATEMENT RE THE U.S. SUPPLYING EGYPT WITH ADVANCED WEAPONRY COMPARABLE TO OUR MILITARY AID PROGRAM WITH ISRAEL, YOU SHOULD DRAW ON FOLLOWING.

-- I THINK WE HAVE TO UNDERSTAND WHY SADAT FEELS THE NEED TO MAKE SUCH A PUBLIC STATEMENT. HE IS GENUINELY CONCERNED ABOUT THE POTENTIAL EFFECT ON THE PEACE PROCESS, AMONG HIS OWN PEOPLE AND THE OTHER ARABS, IF THE U.S. ANNOUNCES A LARGE, NEW AMERICAN MILITARY SUPPLY PROGRAM FOR ISRAEL, INCLUDING ADVANCED AIRCRAFT, WHILE CRITICAL NEGOTIATIONS ARE GOING ON. HE IS ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT THE DETERIORATION OF EGYPT'S MILITARY CAPABILITY, PARTICULARLY BECAUSE OF SOVIET ACTIVITIES IN THE HORN AND ELSEWHERE IN AFRICA, WHICH HE SEES AS UNDERMINING MODERATE REGIMES AND THREATENING STABILITY. I BELIEVE HE IS NOT SO MUCH MAKING A REQUEST FOR AID AS CALLING ATTENTION TO HIS PROBLEM.

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YOUR THURSDAY MEETING BUT FOR YOUR PLANNING PURPOSES,
WE WILL HAVE A MESSAGE ON ANOTHER SUBJECT FOR YOU TO
CONVEY TO BEGIN SATURDAY MORNING AT LEAST BY PHONE.
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Secure: OPEN
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TAGS: PEPR, MASS, PBOR, SA, IS, US, EG, XF, (BEGIN, MENACHEM)
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